# Using Paragraphs in Academic Writing

**Study Development Factsheet**

Writing paragraphs helps you to express ideas as well as build an academic argument clearly and concisely, which is easy for a reader to follow. Paragraphs enable you to develop your idea by defining a topic, putting forward an argument, and support it with main points, academic evidence, and examples. Use, [Plan an Assignment worksheet with this resource](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/library/library-study-and-digital-skills/study-success/skills-guides/#writing-essentials).

Paragraphs can:

* Signal an introduction, new ideas, or a point
* Signal a change in direction in an argument
* Elaborate on a point you have made or explain the idea in further detail
* Link theory to practice or provide an example
* Summarise what has been said before – move on to the next stage of the argument
* Help you to write critically (critical paragraph – P.E.E.L) model where you link your point to build your argument.

To develop an idea, you will need to write paragraphs that show smooth transitions by using sentences to connect one idea to another. Transitions can introduce a topic or a theory, move from one idea to another, critically evaluate a standpoint, summarise something, and reintroduce a key point.

## How can I use paragraphs in academic writing?

**Below is a summary of paragraphs and how you can use each to write an essay and or build an argument.**

**Introduce a topic**

Academic writing requires you to introduce a topic to the reader as this signals the subject matter, why it is important and what you want to say about it. When introducing a topic, it can be useful to define what the term is as this shows your understanding of it and tells the reader what is meant by it. You can expand on a definition by discussing the origins, historical or contemporary developments as well as how the term is considered or used within your subject area.

**Topic introduction examples:**

*This essay will examine X…*

*X is an essential idea to Y and has pioneered…*

**Introduce a definition examples:**

*The (topic) is defined as…*

*Key theorists first coined the term X and defined it as…*

**Introduce or make a point:**

This introduces the reader to a main idea or expresses what you want to say about the subject matter. You can make a point that shows your standpoint on a topic, present a fact, or an author’s position in your field. Points can also give context or an explanation, as well as propose a new theory or idea.

**Examples of how to write a main point:**

*Webber’s theory proposes that there are X components that create…*

*This study on X challenges notions of…*

*Current debates on X have established significant limitations of…*

*This essay, report, or thesis will argue… (your standpoint)*

**How to present evidence in a paragraph:**

Evidence is crucial as it is a way to support the points you make in academic writing.

* When you want to use the author’s own words, use a quotation as evidence.

* When you want to present an author’s idea or argument in your own words, paraphrase. For guidance on paraphrasing, go to [Purdue Online Writing Lab, Paraphrase: Write it in your own words webpage](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/using_research/quoting_paraphrasing_and_summarizing/paraphrasing.html).

You can introduce evidence by:

In the article, the (author or study) found… or concludes….

For **examples about referencing a quotation**, go to [Cite Them Right](https://www.citethemrightonline.com/) or [book an in-person or online tutorial with your YSJ Academic Liaison Librarian](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/library/academic-liaison-librarians/).

After introducing a point that is supported with evidence, you can also expand upon this by:

* **Explain** what the point and evidence means in your subject area.
* **Addition** can be used to provide a further idea or another author’s standpoint, for example: *Another significant standpoint that supports X is… An addition can also be a counterargument, for example: Z challenges X’s standpoint due to the lack of evidence on…*

**Link** a point to the following paragraph or the essay’s academic argument.

**Examples of moving from one point to another:**

* *So far, this essay has examined (a theory, argument or idea) and will now address the implications of (a different author’s idea or standpoint about what was discussed in the previous paragraph).*
* *The debates summarised about (your topic) from contemporary literature raise an interesting standpoint on X and support... (your argument or idea you want to develop).*

**Examples of linking a point to the essay’s academic argument:**

* *The evidence and findings presented in this essay prove that Z is a crucial issue that must be examined further.*
* *To conclude, the previous points made about (your topic or argument) illustrate a gap in X, which requires further studies to be conducted.*

**Critical Paragraphs**

There are different models you can use to **structure**, **write**, and **apply criticality** **to a paragraph.**

**The P.E.E.L. Model**

Use the **Point, evidence, evaluate, and link (PEEL) model** to construct a paragraph and link it to the purpose of your assignment or academic argument.

* **Introduce the topic** to your reader.
* **(P) Tell the reader! What is the main idea?** Explain the point in one sentence, for example: Historically, it has been argued that...
* **(E) Support the point with academic evidence** by using a quotation or paraphrasing the research to back up your argument, for example:
* The author’s text supports (the idea you have written).
* Include an example to show the reader how an idea might be used or applied within a specific scenario. For examples of how to give examples, go to [Manchester Academic Phrasebank’s Giving Examples webpage](https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/giving-examples/).
* **(E) Evaluate the point and or evidence!** Explain why your idea or evidence is relevant and how it supports your argument, for example:
* Illustrate a strength - *The (name of a theory) applied to (your topic) demonstrated that it was a successful method which achieved... (a positive outcome or new findings).*
* Illustrate a problem or limitation - *The (name of a theory) fails to address key issues found when applied to (a scenario or study).*

For examples of critical evaluation starter sentences, go to [Manchester Academic Phrasebank’s Being Critical webpage](https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/being-critical/).

* **(L) Link** a paragraph to the essay question, your argument, or move on to a new topic.
* To link the paragraph back to your argument or essay question, write a concluding sentence which can restate an idea or summarise what the field’s standpoint is on a topic, for example: *The research has shown... or... from this, the findings conclude...*
* To signal a transition from one idea to another, you can summarise and evaluate what the field already knows about a topic, then move on to a new or different standpoint. For more examples, go to [Manchester Academic Phrasebank’s signalling transitions](https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/signalling-transition/).

Watch [Master the P.E.E.L. Technique for Perfect Paragraph Structure video,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ErmYTPN23YI) which explains further how to use this model.

**The P.E.E. Model**

This paragraph structure comprises of:

* **(P)** Introduce a point.
* **(E)** Use academic evidence to support the point.
* **(E)** Critically evaluate the point and/or evidence.

For further guidance on the P.E.E. model, go to the [YSJ Study Development Paragraphs Factsheet](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/media/content-assets/document-directory/documents/Paragraphs-Factsheet.pdf).

**The P.E.T.A.L. Model**

If an assignment requires the writer to use a technique to discuss or analyse something, the P.E.T.A.L. model is a paragraph framework that can support you with this.

Like the P.E.E.L model, introduce the topic your academic assignment is about, then present the main point you want to make, and support it with academic evidence.

* Introduce the topic to the reader.
* **(P)** Introduce the main point or idea.
* **(E)** Support your point with academic evidence.

For guidance on how to make a point and introduce academic evidence, revisit and re-read page 2 of this factsheet.

* **(T)** Introduce the technique you will use to discuss a topic and how it relates to the key point you have made.

A starter sentence example to introduce a technique might be: *The (name of technique) has been used to critically analyse (an idea, artefact, or scenario) and highlighted…*

* **(A)** Analyse and explain what the technique has shown or demonstrated. Critically evaluate any strengths, weaknesses, or limitations found from analysing a topic or scenario whilst using or referring to a technique.

A starter sentence example to analyse and critically evaluate something might be: *The use of (name of technique), revealed (explain what you have found), and shows inconsistencies with (identify the problem).*

**Tip!** You can also replace technique with a theoretical concept relevant to your subject area and critically analyse or discuss how it has impacted or affected a scenario.

* **(L)** Link the paragraph to the academic argument, main topic, or how it relates to your essay question. For further guidance on linking your point, revisit and re-read. Link to the paragraph on page 3 of this factsheet.

**Using Theory**

* Theories are ideas that intend to explain something and can be used in different ways, such as to examine a concept, make sense of something or show how it works as well as critique this. A theory can be applied to look at a topic in-depth, position your research question or to use as a theoretical lens.

Use a theory to:

* Identify how it has been defined, considered or applied to a discipline.
* Examine existing knowledge and use these findings to challenge or support academic discourse, or to position your own research by establishing a gap that you will address.
* Use theory as a lens to examine and evaluate ideas, standpoints or studies about a topic.
* Link a theory to practice to show how it was used in a real-life scenario, demonstrate a deeper understanding of the concept and evaluate its impact.

**Tip!** You can also use additional theories when examining a topic as this can help you to identify and evaluate a range of perspectives which can focus your research or demonstrate an in depth understanding.

**Introduce or Write Comparisons**

Academic writing may require you to write comparative paragraphs which is part of your essay or research paper. A comparative paragraph will introduce and analyse any similarities or differences between theories, standpoints, ideas or themes about a topic.

How to write a comparative paragraph:

* Introduce the topic or main idea you intend to examine.
* Introduce, analyse and discuss the comparison. This may involve identifying and evaluating commonalities or differences of theorists' standpoints, key components present in a concept or theoretical framework.
* Identify and explain what the comparison means, what does it reveal and why is it important to your academic essay or paper.
* What is your closing statement? How does the comparison link to your academic argument, essay or research question?

For examples of how to write comparisons, go to [Manchester Academic Phrasebank’s compare and contrast](https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/compare-and-contrast/).

**Synthesise Information**

Synthesising is when academic sources are grouped together to illustrate similarities and differences on theories, standpoints, methods, key findings or ideas. When synthesising academic literature, you can demonstrate critical thinking through:

* The selection of sources which shows significant relationships between the key texts.
* Identifying, grouping and evaluating any commonalities and differences between different authors ideas, academic standpoints, methods or results.
* Group and present similar ideas or standpoints to support your academic argument or differing ideas to show any problems or limitations.
* Link these to support your own academic standpoint or research.

**How to synthesise:**

* Introduce the topic and key texts.
* Summarise each academic text concisely.
* Identify and consider: Are there any relevant concepts or key themes that have emerged, have been discussed or linked together? What are the commonalities and differences of ideas, findings or arguments between the academic texts?
* What evidence will you use to support your summaries? Paraphrasing texts demsontrates your understanding however in text citations can also be used. See page 2 of this factsheet on how to present evidence.
* Write your synthesis in relation to your own standpoint or argument.

**Write a Reflective Paragraph**

Reflective writing involves an exploration and evaluation of a real-life scenario that may have taken place during training, practice-based study or workplace. Academic reflections require appropriate theory to be considered, integrated and applied to evaluate a real-life scenario which can enable you to identify what you have learnt or need to do differently next time.

**YSJ Study Development has a range of factsheets and worksheets to support writing reflections and paragraphs.**

For an introduction to different reflective models that can be used in academic writing, go to [Reflective Writing Factsheet](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/media/content-assets/student-services/documents/Reflective-Writing-Factsheet.pdf).

For guidance on how to write academic reflections using Discoll, Gibbs and Kolb model and a worksheet that guides you through each stage go to, [Study Development’s being reflective self help resources](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/library/library-study-and-digital-skills/study-success/skills-guides/#being-reflective).

**Write a Conclusion**

**What is the purpose of a conclusion?**

* Summarise the main points made which links back to the academic argument
* Restate the essay question which is followed by an answer.
* Put forward a decision about a topic by summarising the significance of key findings which is followed by proposed recommendations.

For examples of how to write a conclusion with starter sentence examples, go to [Manchester Academic Phrasebank, Writing Conclusions](https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/writing-conclusions/).

**Support**:

Study Development offers workshops, short courses, 1 to 1 and small group tutorials.

* Book a tutorial or join a workshop by searching ‘YSJ study development tutorials.’
* Access our Study Success resources on the Study Success webpage by searching ‘YSJ study success.’